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Miscellaneous Pamphlets

Vol. 21.

MINUTES

OF THE

PHILADELPHIA CONVENTION

OF

MINISTERS AND RULING ELDERS

IN THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES.

CALLED BY THE

MINORITY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF **1836.**

MAY 11, 1837.

PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED FOR THE CONVENTION.

1837.

WM. S. MARTIEN,

PRINTER.

MINUTES.

THURSDAY, May 11, 1837, 10 o'clock, A. M.

THE Convention of Presbyterian Ministers and Ruling Elders recommended by the Committee appointed by the minority of the last General Assembly, met, agreeably to appointment, in the Sixth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, and was temporarily organized by the election of the Rev. James Blythe D. D. as Chairman, and the Rev. Thomas D. Baird, as Secretary.

The Convention was opened with prayer by the Chairman.

On motion it was,

Resolved, That Rev. Dr. Cuyler, Rev. James Coe, and Walter Lowrie, Esq. be a Committee to receive the Commissions of the Delegates appointed by Presbyteries and Minorities of Presbyteries to attend this Convention, and that they report the roll to-morrow morning.

Resolved, That Rev. G. A. Baxter, D. D. George Junkin, D. D. Rev. Messrs. A. D. Campbell, H. H. Hopkins, S. H. Crane, H. S. Pratt, and J. C. Irwin, Elder, be a committe to nominate a list of officers and propose rules for the due organization of this Convention and report to-morrow morning. It was then,

Resolved, That the Convention spend this day in humiliation and prayer before God, to seek the Divine aid and direction in the discharge of the important duties to which it is called; and, that the exercises consist in prayer, praise, and exhortation under the direction of the Chairman, together with a sermon in the evening.

The Rev. Joshua L. Wilson, D. D. was appointed to preach the sermon.

Agreeably to the foregoing arrangement, the Rev. Drs. Baxter, Witherspoon, Green, and Mr. Coe led in prayer; when the Convention took a recess until half past 3 o'clock, P. M.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 3½ o'clock.

After recess, the Convention met and resumed the religious exercises of the day. Dr. Junkin, Mr. Tate, and Mr. Krebs led in prayer, and Dr. Goulding and Mr. Plumer delivered suitable addresses.

A sermon was preached in the evening by the Rev. Dr. Wilson, from John xiv. 1. "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Adjourned to meet to-morrow morning at 9 o'clock.

Concluded with prayer.

FRIDAY MORNING, May 12th, 9 o'clock.

The Convention met agreeably to adjournment, and was opened with prayer. The minutes of yesterday were read.

Dr. CUYLER, from the Committee of Commissions, reported the following list of persons duly commissioned to sit as members of the Convention :

ROLL OF THE CONVENTION.

NOTE.—Although some of the delegates came in on the second and third days of the sessions, yet they are all included in the following roll, instead of having their names entered at the time of their appearance.

The names with the asterisk (*) were appointed by minorities, the following being exceptions : viz.

The Presbytery of Marion did not appoint a delegate, but expressed their willingness that *Mr. Dolbear* might, on his own responsibility, attend.

Mr. Redington, from the Presbytery of Ontario, appeared and was admitted as constituting the only minority of his Presbytery favourable to the Convention.

Mr. Bouton, from the Presbytery of Trumbull, was, as standing alone in his Presbytery, commissioned by his Session, and the minority of a neighbouring Church.

Mr. Platt, from the Presbytery of Albany, was admitted, although the minority of his Presbytery had not acted on the subject of the Convention.

PRESBYTERIES.	MINISTERS.	ELDERS.
Alleghany,	J. W. Johnson,	Walter Lowrie.
Albany,		Annanias Platt.*
Bedford,	Reuben Frame,	John Owen.
Baltimore,	R. J. Breckinridge,	
"	G. W. Musgrave,	
Beaver,	Wm. O. Stratton,	James Adair.
Blairsville,	Watson Hughes,	Joseph Cook.
Columbus,	Elias Van Deman,	Wm. Patterson.
Carlisle,	Thomas Creigh,	David Fullerton.
"	M. B. Patterson,	
Charleston Union,	Thomas Smyth*	
"	W. A. McDowell, D.D.*	
Cincinnati,	J. L. Wilson, D. D.*	William Cumback.
Concord,	Walter S. Pharr,	G. Andrews.
Erie,	S. Tait,	J. McCrackin.
East Hanover,	William S. Plumer,	John Dunn.
Fayetteville,	Archibald McQueen.	David G. Coit.
Flint River,	T. Goulding, D. D.	
Georgia,	H. S. Pratt,	
Genesee,		Donald Fraser, jr.

PRESBYTERIES.	MINISTERS.	ELDERS.
Harmony,	J. Witherspoon, D. D.	John C. Coit.
Hopewell,	C. W. Howard,	
Huntingdon,	McK. Williamson,	Henry Long.
Indianopolis,	J. W. McKennan,	Isaac Coe.
Kaskaskia,	J. Stafford,	James H. Rice.
Louisiana,	James Smylie,	Nath. Smylie.
Louisville,	H. H. Hopkins,	C. S. Todd.
Lancaster,	Samuel Wilson,	Robert Miller.
Lexington,	John Hendren,	J. Alexander.
Madison,	James Blythe, D. D.	Robert Marshall.
Marion,	Wm. Dolbear,*	
Mississippi,	J. H. Vancourt,	
Miami,	Simeon H. Crane,	David Osborne.
Morgantown,	A. L. Watts,	
Nashville,	James Galbraith,	John Patten.
New Brunswick,	Isaac V. Brown,	John Voorhees.
"	J. L. Shafer,	David W. Vail.
New Castle,	J. N. C. Grier,	John Robinson.
"	W. F. Houston,	Nath. W. Semple.
New York,	George Potts,	Samuel Boyd.
"	John Goldsmith,	James Lenox.
Newton,	George Junkin, D. D.	Thomas McKeen.
"	B. I. Lowe,	George W. Smith.
Northumberland,	John H. Grier,	J. B. Boyd.
Orange,	Eli W. Caruthers,	
Ohio,	T. D. Baird,	John Gladden.
"	A. D. Campbell,	Thomas Kiddoo.
Ontario,	John H. Redington,*	
Oxford,	P. H. Golliday,	
Philadelphia,	Wm. M. Engles,	Charles J. Davis.
"	John W. Grier,	Charles Woodward.
Philadelphia 2d,	C. C. Cuyler, D. D.	James Darrach.
Redstone,	William Annan,	Nathaniel Ewing.
Richland,	Adam Torrence,	James B. Turner.
Roanoke,	S. L. Graham, D. D.	
Rochester,	Jacob Hart,*	
Sidney,	James Coe,	Thomas Marquis, sr.
South Carolina,	Anthony W. Ross,	J. W. Simpson.
Schuyler,	W. K. Stewart,	W. Bailey.
Susquehanna,	John Dorrance,	Isaac Harris.
Steubenville,	Benjamin Mitchell,	John Hannah.

PRESBYTERIES.	MINISTERS.	ELDERS.
Salem,	Alex. Williamson,*	
Trumbull,	Enoch Bouton,*	
Troy,	Reuben Smith,*	
Tuscaloosa,	N. R. Morgan.	David Johnson.
Vincennes,	Hugh H. Patten,	Minard S. Smith.
West Hanover,	G. A. Baxter, D. D.	Samuel C. Anderson.
"	Andrew Hart,	
Watertown,	E. H. Snowden,*	
Western District,	Samuel Hodge,	James Greer.
West Lexington,	Charles Stuart,	J. M. C. Irwin.
Winchester,	William H. Foot,	
Washington,	James Hervey,	Jacob Slagle.
Wooster,	Thomas Beer,	Joseph McComb.

The Rev. A. D. Campbell from the Committee for nominating Officers and Preparing Rules for the Convention, reported, and their report was adopted, appointing

Rev. G. A. Baxter, D. D. *President of Convention.*
" C. C. Cuyler, D. D. *Vice President.*
" T. D. Baird, *Recording Clerk.*
" H. S. Pratt, *Reading Clerk.*

The Report also recommended the adoption of the rules contained in our Book of Discipline, for the government of the Convention in its deliberations as far as they may be applicable to the circumstances of the case.

Dr. Wilson, and Mr. Engles, were appointed a committee to correct the roll and examine such commissions as may yet be presented to this body.

After some discussion, it was

Resolved, That the Convention go into committee of the whole, on the State of the Church; Dr. Whitherspoon in the chair.

A paper on the State of the Church was then read by Dr. Wilson from the minority of the Presbytery of Cincinnati; after which the committee rose, reported progress, and asked leave to sit again. The Convention then had a recess until half past three o'clock.

Friday Afternoon, 3½ o'clock.

After recess, the Convention met and went into committee of the whole, on the State of the Church, Dr. J. L. Wilson in the Chair.

Communications were read from the Presbyteries of Lancaster, Blairsville, Carlisle, and Richland; and other papers from Rev. Mr.

Engles, Rev. J. H. Kennedy, Rev. R. G. Wilson, D. D. and Rev. Mr. Bouton.

After these papers had been received, it was

Resolved, To call upon the Presbyteries in the order of the roll, for the purpose of eliciting facts relative to the present State of the Church, and suggestions adapted to the exigency of the case.

After some progress in calling the roll, the committee rose, reported progress, and asked leave to sit again. The Convention then adjourned until 9 o'clock to-morrow morning.

Concluded with prayer.

SATURDAY, MAY 13, 9 o'clock, A. M.

The Convention met agreeably to adjournment, and was opened with prayer. The minutes of yesterday were read.

The Convention resolved itself into committee of the whole, Dr. Wilson in the Chair. The calling upon the Presbyteries was resumed, and after some progress the Committee rose, reported progress, and asked leave to sit again. The Convention then had a recess until half past 3 o'clock, P. M.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON, 3½ o'clock.

After recess the Convention met, and resumed business.

On motion, it was

Resolved, That the Rev. Messrs. J. L. Wilson, D. D., G. A. Baxter, D. D., W. H. Foot, J. Witherspoon, D. D., G. W. Musgrave, George Potts, and W. M. Engles, and N. Ewing, S. Anderson and S. Boyd, Ruling Elders, be a Committee to prepare business for the Convention, while the calling of the roll proceeds.

The Convention then went into Committee of the whole, Dr. Witherspoon in the Chair. After some progress, the Committee rose, and the Convention adjourned until Monday morning at 9 o'clock.

Concluded with prayer.

MONDAY, MAY 15, 9 o'clock, A. M.

The Convention met agreeably to adjournment, and was opened with prayer. The minutes of the last meeting were read. Convention went into Committee of the whole, Mr. Plumer in the Chair.

On motion, it was

Resolved, That the regular calling of the roll be suspended, with a view to hear from the Presbyteries of Schuyler, Watertown, Troy, Rochester, Kaskaskia, Trumbull, and Ontario. After hearing statements

from some of these Presbyteries, the Committee rose and reported progress, when the Convention took a recess until half past 3 o'clock.

MONDAY AFTERNOON, 3¼ o'clock.

After recess, the Convention going into Committee of the whole as before, the other Presbyteries above mentioned, with the addition of those of South Carolina and New York were heard, when the Committee rose.

Dr. WILSON, Chairman of the Committee of Business, reported in part. The report being accepted, was read by paragraphs, but before it was finished, the Convention adjourned until to-morrow morning at 9 o'clock. Concluded with prayer.

TUESDAY, MAY 16, 9 o'clock, A. M.

The Convention met agreeably to adjournment, and was opened with prayer.

The unfinished business was taken up, and the report of the Committee was further considered.

Dr. WILSON, Chairman of the Business Committee, made an additional report, which was placed on the docket, and the Convention then resumed the consideration of the first report, but before any final action, a recess until half past 3 o'clock was agreed to.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON, 3½ o'clock.

After the recess, the Convention resumed the unfinished business, and the report of the Committee was amended and adopted. [The report is incorporated in the Memorial.]

A resolution was offered by the Rev. I. V. Brown, which was referred to the Business Committee. It was then

Resolved, That Messrs. Breckinridge, Potts, Smyth, of S. C., Ewing, and Fullerton, be a Committee to prepare a Memorial to be presented to the next General Assembly.

A resolution was offered by the Committee on Business, respecting the verification of the rights of members to seats in the General Assembly, which was recommitted.

A resolution was offered in relation to a division of the Church, which was committed to the same Committee. Adjourned to meet tomorrow morning, at 9 o'clock. Concluded with prayer.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 9 o'clock, A. M.

The Convention met agreeably to adjournment, and was opened with prayer. The minutes of the last session were read.

The Chairman of the business Committee made another report in continuation, which was amended, and adopted, [the report is incorporated in the Memorial.]

A motion was made respecting Presbyterian ministers placed over Congregational Churches, which after some discussion was referred to Messrs. Plumer, Cuyler, Blythe, and Morgan.

Mr. Plumer offered the following resolution which was unanimously adopted: viz.

Resolved, That as these are times of high and dangerous excitability in the public mind, when imprudent or partizan men may do great injury, especially when they have facilities for operating on a large field, the Convention is of opinion that the General Assembly ought to make known to our national associations not previously noticed in the votes of this Convention, that the Presbyterian Church expects of them peculiar caution, in the selection of their travelling agents, and that it ought to be regarded as peculiarly unkind in any of them to give to the correspondence, or general bearing of these institutions, a bias against the strictest order and soundest principle, in our beloved branch of the Church of Christ.

It was then moved that if the General Assembly shall refuse to adopt some plan of substantial reform, it will be necessary for the Convention to adopt some ulterior and decided measures. After some discussion the Convention had a recess until $3\frac{1}{2}$ o'clock.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, $3\frac{1}{2}$ o'clock.

The discussion of the propriety of ulterior measures was again resumed and continued until the Convention took a recess until 8 o'clock.

8 o'clock, P. M.

The unfinished business was resumed, and it was finally resolved to defer the further consideration of the matter until the first meeting after the organization of the Assembly.

Resolved, That Messrs. Engles and Baird be a Committee to have 2500 copies of the minutes of this Convention printed for distribution among the Presbyteries or minorities of Presbyteries represented in this Convention.

Resolved, That Messrs. Breckinridge, Pratt, and Ewing, Commissioners to the General Assembly, be requested to contest the right to seats of any claiming to be Commissioners to said Assembly, who may be supposed to be constitutionally ineligible, or not duly elected.

Adjourned to meet to-morrow morning, at 9 o'clock. Concluded with prayer.

THURSDAY, MAY 18, 9 o'clock, A. M.

The Convention met agreeably to adjournment, and was opened with prayer.

A motion was made by Mr. Coe, which was referred to the business Committee.

It was then

Resolved, That we will give a just and decided preference to such religious periodicals and papers *as are sound in the faith*, and Christian in their spirit; at the same time discountenancing those of an opposite character. And *more particularly*, that we will give a cordial and adequate support to such *Presbyterian* publications, as, during the great controversy which now shakes our Church, have ever been found, the open, firm, and consistent advocates of the whole truth of God, as laid down in our inestimable standards. And we earnestly recommend this course to all who in sincerity and truth, love the doctrines and polity of the Presbyterian Church in these United States.

The convention had a recess for half an hour, and after the recess, the Committee on the Memorial reported in part, when it was

Resolved, To have a recess until 8 o'clock this evening.

8 o'clock, P. M.

After recess the Convention met.

Mr. Engles offered two resolutions proposing to the other party in the Church, the terms of amicable separation; these resolutions were laid on the table, that the Convention might offer up thanksgiving to Almighty God, for the present favourable indications in the General Assembly, by the election this day of an orthodox Moderator and Clerks. After prayer, the unfinished business was resumed, and the memorial being read was adopted; and it was ordered that it be signed by the officers of the Convention; and that 500 copies of it be immediately printed for the use of the Convention and Assembly.

The Convention then adjourned to meet at the call of the President or at the request of any five members. Concluded with prayer.

[The Convention met frequently during the sessions of the General Assembly, in connexion with orthodox members of that body, for the purpose of consultation on the state of the Church. As these meetings were principally conversational ones, there were no minutes made of the proceedings. The Convention finally adjourned immediately after the adjournment of the General Assembly, on Thursday, June 8th, 1837.]

TESTIMONY AND MEMORIAL.

When any portion of the Church of Jesus Christ is called in his providence to take a step which may materially affect their Master's cause, and influence for good or ill the destinies of large portions of mankind through successive generations;—it is a very plain, as well as solemn duty, to state clearly the reasons of their conduct—the evils of which they complain—the objects at which they aim—and the remedies which they propose. This Convention, consisting of one hundred and twenty-four members, of whom one hundred and twelve are delegated by fifty-four Presbyteries, and twelve by minorities in eight other Presbyteries, all of which members are ministers or ruling elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America; after mature deliberation, full consultation with each other, and earnest prayer to God for direction, have agreed on the following memorial, and do hereby respectfully lay it before the General Assembly now in session—and through it before all the churches and the whole world, as our solemn, and as we trust effective Testimony against evils which faithfulness to God, and to the world, will no longer permit us to endure.

That we have not been rash and hasty, nor manifested a factious opposition, to errors and disorders, which were only of small extent, or recent introduction, is manifestly proven by the fact that these evils have been insidiously spreading through our Church for many years—and that they have at length become so mature, and so diffused, as not only to pervade large portions of the Church, but to reign triumphantly over the body itself, through successive General Assemblies. On the other hand, that we have not been wholly faithless to our Master and to truth, we appeal to the constant efforts of some through the press and pulpit—to the firm and consistent course of some of our Presbyteries and Synods—to the faithful conduct of the minorities in the Assemblies of 1831, 2, 3, 4, and 6—to the Act and Testimony—to the proceedings of the Conventions of Cincinnati in 1831, and Pittsburgh in 1835, and to the noble Assembly of 1835.

We contend especially and above all for *the truth*, as it is made known to us of God, for the salvation of men. We contend for nothing else, except as the result or support of this inestimable treasure. It is because this is subverted that we grieve; it is because our standards teach it, that we bewail their perversion; it is because our Church order and discipline preserve, defend, and diffuse it, that we weep over their impending ruin. It is against *error* that we emphatically bear our testimony,—error dangerous to the souls of men, dishonouring to Jesus Christ, contrary to his revealed truth, and utterly at variance with our standards. Error not as it may be freely and openly held by others, in this age and land of absolute religious freedom; but error held, and taught in the Presbyterian Church, preached and written by persons who profess to receive and adopt our Scriptural standards—promoted by societies operating widely through our churches—reduced into form, and openly embraced by almost entire Presbyteries and

Synods—favoured by repeated acts of successive General Assemblies, and at last virtually sanctioned to an alarming extent by the numerous Assembly of 1836.

To be more specific, we hereby set forth in order, some of the doctrinal errors against which we bear testimony, and which we, and the churches, have conclusive proof, are widely disseminated in the Presbyterian Church.

IN RELATION TO DOCTRINE.

1. That God would have been glad to prevent the existence of sin in our world, but was not able, without destroying the moral agency of man: or, that for aught that appears in the Bible to the contrary, sin is incidental to any wise moral system.

2. That election to eternal life is founded on a foresight of faith and obedience.

3. That we have no more to do with the first sin of Adam than with the sins of any other parent.

4. That infants come into the world as free from moral defilement as was Adam, when he was created.

5. That infants sustain the same relation to the moral government of God in this world as brute animals, and that their sufferings and death are to be accounted for, on the same principles as those of brutes, and not by any means to be considered as penal.

6. That there is no other original sin than the fact that all the posterity of Adam, though by nature innocent, or possessed of no moral character, will always begin to sin when they begin to exercise moral agency; that original sin does not include a sinful bias of the human mind, and a just exposure to penal suffering; and that there is no evidence in Scripture, that infants, in order to salvation, do need redemption by the blood of Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Ghost.

7. That the doctrine of imputation, whether of the guilt of Adam's sin, or of the righteousness of Christ, has no foundation in the word of God, and is both unjust and absurd.

8. That the sufferings and death of Christ were not truly vicarious and penal, but symbolical, govermental, and instructive only.

9. That the impenitent sinner is by nature, and independently of the renewing influence or almighty energy of the Holy Spirit, in full possession of all the ability necessary to a full compliance with all the commands of God.

10. That Christ never intercedes for any but those who are actually united to him by faith; or that Christ does not intercede for the elect until after their regeneration.

11. That saving faith is the mere belief of the word of God, and not a grace of the Holy Spirit.

12. That regeneration is the act of the sinner himself, and that it consists in a change of his governing purpose, which he himself must produce, and which is the result, not of any direct influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart, but chiefly of a persuasive exhibition of the truth analagous to the influence which one man exerts over the mind of

another; or that regeneration is not an instantaneous act, but a progressive work.

13. That God has done all that *he can do* for the salvation of all men, and that man himself must do the rest.

14. That God cannot exert such influence on the minds of men, as shall make it certain that they will choose and act in a particular manner without impairing their moral agency.

15. That the righteousness of Christ is not the sole ground of the sinner's acceptance with God; and that in no sense does the righteousness of Christ become ours.

16. That the reason why some differ from others in regard to their reception of the Gospel is, that they make themselves to differ.

It is impossible to contemplate these errors without perceiving, that they strike at the foundation of the system of Gospel grace; and that, from the days of Pelagius and Cassian to the present hour, their reception has uniformly marked the character of a Church apostatizing from "the faith once delivered to the saints," and sinking into deplorable corruption. To bear a public and open testimony against them, and as far as possible to banish them from the "household of faith," is a duty which the Presbyterian Church owes to her Master in heaven, and without which it is impossible to fulfil the great purpose for which she was founded by her Divine Head and Lord. And this Convention is conscious that in pronouncing these errors unscriptural, radical, and highly dangerous, it is actuated by no feeling of party zeal; but by a firm and growing persuasion that such errors cannot fail in their ultimate effect, to subvert the foundation of Christian hope, and destroy the souls of men. The watchmen on the walls of Zion would be traitors to the trust reposed in them, were they not to cry aloud, and proclaim a solemn warning against opinions so corrupt and delusive.

IN RELATION TO CHURCH ORDER.

Believing the Presbyterian Form of Government to be that instituted by the inspired Apostles of the Lord, in the early church, and sanctioned, if not commanded, in the scattered notices contained in the New Testament, on the general subject; our hearts cling to it as to that order approved by revelation of God, and made manifest by long experience, as the best method of preserving and spreading his truth. When that truth is in danger we hold but the more steadfastly to our distinctive church order, as affording the best method of detecting and vanquishing error. That any form of administration should totally prevent evil, is manifestly impossible while men continue as they are; and it is no small praise to the institutions of our church, that they so nearly reach this result, as to be incapable of regular action, in the hands of those who are themselves corrupt. They live with and for the truth; to spread error, they must be perverted; and before a general apostasy, Presbyterian order must always perish.

Thus it has been in these evil times. Abundant proof is before this Convention, and indeed before the whole world, that the principles of our system have been universally departed from, by those who have departed from our faith; and that generally that has been done with

equal steps. Or if, as there is reason to fear, some portions of the church, still hold the external form of Presbyterianism, and deny the power of its sacred doctrines, they are those only, who, in attaching themselves to us, have either evaded subscription to our creed—or subscribed without believing it. It is enough that any system should exclude honest errorists—and speedily detect, if it cannot *exclude those who are otherwise.*

Among the departures from sound Presbyterian order, against which we feel called on to testify, as marking the times, are the following:

1. The formation of Presbyteries without defined and reasonable limits, or Presbyteries, covering the same territory, and especially such a formation founded on doctrinal repulsions or affinities: thus introducing schism into the very vitals of the body.

2. The refusal of Presbyteries when requested by any of their members, to examine all applicants for admission into them, as to their soundness in the faith, or touching any other matter connected with a fair Presbyterial standing: thus concealing and conniving at error, in the very strong hold of truth.

3. The licensing of persons to preach the Gospel, and the ordaining to the office of the ministry such as not only accept of our standards merely for substance of doctrine, and others who are unfit and ought to be excluded for want of qualification—but of many even who openly deny fundamental principles of truth, and preach and publish radical errors, as already set forth.

4. The formation of a great multitude and variety of creeds which are often incomplete, false, and contradictory of each other, and of our Confession of Faith and the Bible; but which even if true are needless, seeing that the public and authorised standards of the Church are fully sufficient for the purposes for which such formularies were introduced, namely, as public testimonies of our faith and practice, as aids to the teaching of the people truth and righteousness, and as instruments for ascertaining and preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace; it being understood that we do not object to the use of a brief abstract of the doctrines of our Confession of Faith, in the public reception of private members of the Church.

5. The needless ordination of a multitude of men to the office of Evangelist, and the consequent tendency to a general neglect of the pastoral office; frequent and hurtful changes of pastoral relations; to the multiplication of spurious excitements, and the consequent spread of heresy and fanaticism, thus weakening and bringing into contempt the ordinary and stated agents and means, for the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the body of Christ.

6. The disuse of the office of Ruling Elder in portions of the Church, and the consequent growth of practices and principles entirely foreign to our system; thus depriving the pastors of needful assistants in discipline, the people of proper guides in Christ, and the churches of suitable representatives in the ecclesiastical tribunals.

7. The electing and ordaining Ruling Elders, with the express understanding that they are to serve but for a limited time.

8 A progressive change in the system of Presbyterial representation

in the General Assembly, which has been persisted in by those holding the ordinary majorities, and carried out into detail by those disposed to take undue advantage of existing opportunities, until the actual representation seldom exhibits the true state of the Church, and many questions of the deepest interest have been decided contrary to the fairly ascertained wishes of the majority of the Church and people in our communion: thus virtually subverting the essential principles of freedom, justice, and equality, on which our whole system rests.

9. The unlimited and irresponsible power, assumed by several associations of men under various names, to exercise authority and influence, direct and indirect, over Presbyters, as to their field of labour, place of residence, and mode of action in the difficult circumstances of our Church: thus actually throwing the control of affairs in large portions of the Church, and sometimes in the General Assembly itself, out of the hands of the Presbyteries into those of single individuals or small committees located at a distance.

10. The unconstitutional decisions and violent proceedings of several General Assemblies, and especially those of 1831, 2, 3, 4, and 6, directly or indirectly subverting some of the fundamental principles of Presbyterian government—effectually discountenancing discipline, if not rendering it impossible, and plainly conniving at and favouring, if not virtually affirming as true, the whole current of false doctrine which has been for years setting into our Church, thus making the Church itself *a principal actor in its own dissolution and ruin.*

IN RELATION TO DISCIPLINE.

That a state of affairs even approaching to that over which we now mourn should obstruct the exercise of Discipline, may not only be easily supposed, but unhappily the very evils which rendered it imperatively necessary, conspired to prevent the possibility of its regular exercise. A Church unsound in faith is necessarily corrupt in practice. Truth is in order to Godliness; and when it ceases to make us pure, it is no longer considered worthy of being contended for.

With the woful departures from sound doctrine, which we have already pointed out, and the grievous declensions in Church order heretofore stated, has advanced step by step, the ruin of all sound discipline in large portions of our Church, until in some places our very name is becoming a public scandal, and the proceedings of persons and churches connected with some of our Presbyteries, are hardly to be defended from the accusation of being blasphemous. Amongst other evils, of which this Convention and the Church have full proof, we specify the following;

1. The impossibility of obtaining a plain and sufficient sentence against gross errors, either *in thesi*, or when found in books printed under the name of Presbyterian ministers, or when such ministers have been directly and personally charged.

2. The public countenance thus given to error, and the complete security in which our own members have preached and published in newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals, and books, things utterly subversive of our system of truth and order, while none thought it possible

(except in a few, and they almost fruitless, attempts) that discipline could be exercised; and therefore none attempted it.

3. The disorderly and unseasonable meetings of the people, in which unauthorized and incompetent persons conducted worship in a manner shocking to public decency; females often leading in prayer in promiscuous assemblies, and sometimes in public instruction; the hasty admission to church privileges, and the failure to exercise any wholesome discipline over those who subsequently fall into sin, even of a public and scandalous kind; and by these and other disorders, grieving and alienating the pious members of our churches, and so filling many of them with rash, ignorant, and unconverted persons, as gradually to destroy all visible distinction between the Church and the world.

4. While many of our ministers have propagated error with great zeal, and disturbed the Church with irregular and disorderly conduct; some have entirely given up the stated preaching of the Gospel, others have turned aside to secular pursuits, and others still while nominally engaged in some part of Christian effort, have embarked in the wild and extravagant speculations which have so remarkably signalized the times; thus tending to secularize and disorganize the very ministry of reconciliation.

5. The formation in the bosom of our churches, and ecclesiastical bodies, of parties ranged against each other, on personal, doctrinal, and other questions; strifes and divisions amongst our people—bitter contentions amongst many of our ministers: a general weakening of mutual confidence and affection; and, in some cases, a resort to measures of violence, duplicity, and injustice totally inconsistent with the Christian name.

METHOD OF REFORM.

Such being the state of things in the Presbyterian Church, we believe that the time is fully come, for the adoption of some measures, which shall speedily furnish relief from the evils already referred to. Under this conviction, we present ourselves respectfully before you, praying you to lose no time, in so adjusting the important matters at issue, as to restore at once purity and peace to our distracted Church. We are obliged to record our most solemn and settled belief, that the elements of our present discord are now too numerous, too extensively spread and essentially opposed, to warrant any hope that they can, in any way be composed, so long as they are compressed within the limits of our present ecclesiastical organization. Mutual confidence is gone, and is not to be restored by any temporizing measures. This is a sad, but a plain truth. It is a result over which the Church has long mourned, and at which the world has scoffed—but for the production of which we, and those who agree with us, cannot hold ourselves responsible, firmly believing, as we do, that we are, in this controversy, contending for the plain and obvious principles of Presbyterian doctrine and polity. In a word, it needs but a glance at the general character, the personal affinities, and the geographical relations of those who are antagonists in the present contest—to be satisfied that our present evils have not originated within, but have been brought

from without—and are, in a great degree, the consequences of an unnatural intermixture of two systems of ecclesiastical action—which are in many respects entirely opposite in their nature and operation. Two important families in the great Christian community, who might have lived peacefully under different roofs—and maintained a friendly intercourse with each other—have been brought beneath the same roof, and yet without an entire incorporation. Contact has not produced real union, except in a comparatively few instances: on the contrary, original differences of opinions and prejudices in relation to the principles of government and order, in many points of great practical moment, have, for a number of years, been widening instead of narrowing—and those who would have been friendly as neighbours, have, at last, by being forced together into the same dwelling, after many and painful conflicts, furnished abundant evidence of the necessity of some effectual remedy. We cannot consent to meet any longer upon the floors of our several judicatories, to contend against the visible inroads of a system, which, whether so designed or not, is crippling our energies, and which, by obvious but covert advances, menaces our very existence. We are in danger of being driven out from the home of our childhood.

While, however, we complain and testify against the operations of this unnatural, unwise, and unconstitutional alliance just referred to, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do it, chiefly because of our sincere belief that the *doctrinal purity* of our ancient Confession of Faith is endangered—and not because of the preferences we have for a particular system of mere church government and discipline. We hold the latter to be important mainly from their relation to the former. Hence, we wish it to be distinctly understood, that we have not, nor do we wish to have, any controversy with the system of Congregational church government upon its own territory. Towards the churches of New England, which stand fast in the faith once delivered to the saints—towards the distinguished and excellent brethren in the Lord in those churches, who are now testifying against the errors which are troubling *them*, as they are troubling *us*, we entertain the most fraternal esteem and affection. Let there be no strife between us: and there will be none, so long as there is no effort made by either body to intrude upon the domestic concerns of the other. We want no more than to be allowed the fair and unimpeded action of our own ecclesiastical principles. We desire to stand upon our own responsibility—and not to be made involuntary sharers in the responsibility of other bodies and systems of action, with which we cannot entirely harmonize. We desire to perform our Master's work upon principles which we prefer, because they are the first principles of our own ecclesiastical system of government—recognizing at every step the propriety and necessity of responsibility, and refusing to commit to any man, or body of men, large and important trusts, without the right of review, control, and, if needs be, speedy correction.

These being our views, we earnestly urge upon the attention of the Assembly, the following items of reform.

1. While we wish to maintain as heretofore, a friendly correspon-

dence and interchange of annual visits, with the evangelical associations of New-England—we are anxiously looking to the General Assembly in the hope and belief that it will take into immediate consideration the plan of union adopted by the Assembly of 1801, (See Digest, p. 297, 298)—and that it will perceive in the original unconstitutionality and present pernicious operations of that plan, reasons for its immediate abrogation.

2. While we desire that no body of Christian men of other denominations, should be prevented from choosing their own plans of doing good—and while we claim no right to complain, should they exceed us in energy and zeal—we believe, that facts too familiar to need repetition here, warrant us in affirming that the organization and operations of the so called American Home Missionary Society, and American Education Society and its branches of whatever name, are exceedingly injurious to the peace and purity of the Presbyterian Church. We recommend accordingly, that they should be discountenanced, and their operations as far as possible prevented, within our ecclesiastical limits.

3. We believe that every Church, Presbytery, or Synod now in nominal connection with this Assembly, but which is not organized on Presbyterian principles, should be immediately brought into order, dissolved, or disconnected from the Presbyterian Church.

4. We believe that it is highly important, that, at the present time, Presbyteries should be directed to examine henceforward all licentiates and ministers applying for admission from other denominations on the subjects of theology and church government, as well as personal piety and ministerial qualifications, and to require of them an explicit adoption of the Confession of Faith, and Form of Government.

5. We desire that immediate measures be taken, in order that such members of any Presbytery as hold any of the errors, or practise any of the disorders now testified against, may be subjected to discipline: that such Presbyteries and Synods as tolerate them, may be cited and tried, and such of these bodies as are believed to consist chiefly of decidedly unsound or disorderly members may be separated from the Presbyterian Church—provision being made at the same time for the reunion of orthodox churches, private members, or ministers, who may be found in any of them with other convenient bodies.

6. As these are times of high and dangerous excitability in the public mind, when imprudent or partisan men may do great injury, especially when they have facilities for operating on a large field, this Convention is of opinion that the General Assembly ought to make known to our national societies, not previously noticed in this memorial, that the Presbyterian Church expects of them great caution in the selection of their travelling agents, and that it ought to be regarded as peculiarly unkind in any of them to give to the correspondence or general bearing of their institutions, a bias against the strictest order, and soundest principles of our beloved branch of the Church of Christ.

CONCLUSION.

And now we submit to the highest tribunal of our Church—to all our brethren beloved in the Lord—and to the generation in which our

lots are cast—a Testimony which we find ourselves unable to weaken or abridge, and keep a good conscience towards God and man. We have performed a duty to which the providence of God has shut us up. We have done it, in reliance on his grace, and in view of his judgment bar. Whatever the issue may be, we rejoice in the sense of having discharged a great and imperative obligation, manifestly required at our hands, and all whose issues ought to promote the purity, the peace, and the unity of the Church of Christ.

The whole responsibility of future results, is from this moment thrown first upon the General Assembly now in session; and afterwards upon the whole Church. The Assembly will of course, pursue such a line of conduct as will appear to acquit it, before earth and heaven. The destinies of the Presbyterian Church, as now organized, are in its hands—and our Saviour will require a strict account concerning it. The great body of the Church, must needs rejudge the whole action of the Assembly—and on her judgment we repose, with a sacred assurance, second only to that which binds our hearts and souls in filial confidence to her glorious Lord. For ourselves, the hardest portion of our work is past. Hearts which the past has not broken, have little need to fear what the future can bring forth. Spirits which have not died within us, in the trials through which we have been led, may confidently resign themselves to His guidance, whose words have rung ceaselessly upon our hearts "*This* is the way, walk ye in it"—and whose cheering voice comes to us from above, "Fear not, it is I."

By order of Convention.

GEO. A. BAXTER, *President.*
C. C. CUYLER, *Vice President.*

THOS. C. BAIRD,
HORACE S. PRATT, } *Clerks.*

Philadelphia, May 18, 1837.

[The orthodox having a decided majority in the Assembly, the material parts of the Memorial were adopted; the Plan of Union between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists was abrogated; the Synods of Western Reserve, Geneva, Genesee, and Utica, were declared to be no longer constituent parts of the Presbyterian Church; the operations, within the limits of the Presbyterian Church, of the American Home Missionary and American Education Societies were discountenanced; and the Third, or Elective Affinity Presbytery of Philadelphia was dissolved. Thus the objects of the Convention were most happily accomplished.]

APPENDIX.

CIRCULAR EPISTLE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, to all the Churches of Jesus Christ, with grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the Eternal Spirit.

VERY DEAR BRETHREN:

Assembled by the good providence of God, as the supreme judicatory of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, constituting by our ecclesiastical organization not only the "bond of union, peace, correspondence and mutual confidence among all *our* churches," but also the only organ of "correspondence with foreign churches," we cannot consent to separate after the unusually long, interesting, and important session, which we are about to close, without pouring out the fulness of our hearts, in reference to the weighty matters concerning which we have been called to act since we came together, into the ears and bosoms of all other Christian Churches, and especially those with which we are in friendly correspondence.

You cannot be ignorant, dear brethren, that, for a number of years past, the friends of truth, and of regular Presbyterian order in our beloved Zion, have been filled with painful apprehension at the manifest departure from our ecclesiastical standards, which appeared to be gaining ground in a number of our judicatories. Firmly believing that the great purpose for which the Church was founded was that she might maintain in their purity the doctrines and discipline of Christ, and hold them forth to a dark world, we have thought ourselves called upon to make inquiry respecting the errors and disorders alleged to exist, and as far as possible to banish them from that portion of the professing family of Christ with which we are connected. You have witnessed, for a number of successive years, our struggles for the attainment of this object. You have witnessed the mortifying disappointments which from time to time have attended our efforts to obtain, by constitutional means, a redress of the grievances of which we complained. You have seen what we regard as error becoming more extensive in its prevalence, and more bold and overbearing in its claims. You have seen certain Voluntary Societies, under the cover of professed zeal for the doctrines and order of our church, in fact, if not in intention, gradually subverting both. You have heard the motives of the friends of truth reproached; their names cast out as evil; their zeal for maintaining the purity of the Gospel represented as a mere struggle for power; and all their attempts to detect and censure heresy held up to public view as the efforts of restless and ambitious men to gain the pre-eminence for themselves. Amidst these ineffectual attempts to banish error, and to restore order, vital piety has languished; mutual confidence has disappeared; the reviving and converting influences of the Holy Spirit have been withheld, and our time and strength have been painfully occupied with strife and debate, instead of being wholly given to the spread of the Gospel, and the conversion of the world.

We shall not stop to inquire by whose agency, or by what steps this state of things has been produced. The adjustment of the proper award in regard to this question, might be deemed an invidious task, and fail of commanding universal assent. But on the deplorable character of the situation in which we were placed, there can be but one opinion. Over our conflicts every friend of religion has mourned; every intelligent member of the Presbyterian

Church has felt grieved and humbled; and we were becoming a reproach among all surrounding denominations. To every enlightened beholder it has been long manifest that parties so heterogeneous and discordant could no longer act together in the same body either with comfort to themselves, or with honour and edification to the cause of our common Christianity.

Such has been our melancholy history, especially for the last six years; and such were the discouraging and distressing circumstances in which this Assembly convened. On coming together it was found to contain such a decided majority of the friends of truth and order, as to place within our reach the most thorough measures of reform. And it is worthy of especial notice that this majority was created and brought together in full view of the measures adopted by the orthodox Assembly of 1835, and of all the conflicts and painful disclosures which characterized the Assembly of 1836. It was after the attention of the whole church had been strongly called to these measures and disclosures that our Presbyteries sent a delegation, the major part of whom declared in favour of the doctrines and order of our body. We felt ourselves, therefore, distinctly and solemnly called upon, by the voice of the Church, to go forward and rescue her struggling and bleeding interests from that humiliating and degrading perversion to which they had been so long exposed. This painful duty we have endeavoured to perform in the fear of God. And although we do not claim that our manner of discharging it has been wholly free from the manifestation of human infirmity, we do hope and believe that our measures have been accompanied with much sincere and humble seeking for Divine direction; and that they are such as the enlightened and impartial friends of our ecclesiastical constitution will ultimately approve.

As the great truths of the Gospel lie at the foundation of all Christian hope, as well as of the purity and prosperity of the Church, we felt ourselves bound to direct early and peculiarly solemn attention to those doctrinal errors, which there was but too much evidence had gained an alarming prevalence in some of our judicatories. The advocates of these errors, on their first appearance, were cautious and reserved, alleging that they differed in words only from the doctrines as stated in our public standards. Very soon, however, they began to contend that their opinions were really new, and were a substantial and important improvement on the old creed of the Church; and, at length, that revivals of religion could not be hoped for, and that the souls of men must be destroyed, if the old doctrines continued to be preached. The errors thus promulgated were by no means of that doubtful or unimportant character which seems to be assigned to them even by some of the professed friends of orthodoxy. You will see, by our published acts, that some of them affect the very foundation of the system of Gospel truth, and that they all bear relations to the Gospel plan, of very serious and ominous import. Surely doctrines which go to the formal or virtual denial of our covenant relation to Adam; the native and total depravity of man; the entire inability of the sinner to recover himself from rebellion and corruption; the nature and source of regeneration; and our justification solely on account of the imputed righteousness of the Redeemer—cannot, upon any just principle, be regarded as "minor errors!" They form, in fact, "another Gospel;" and it is impossible for those who faithfully adhere to our public standards, to walk with those who adopt such opinions with either comfort or confidence.

It cannot be denied, indeed, that those who adopted and preached these opinions, at the same time, declared their readiness to subscribe our Confession of Faith, and actually professed their assent to it, in the usual form, without apparent scruple. This, in fact, was one of the most revolting and alarming characteristics of their position. They declared, that, in doing this, they only adopted the Confession "*for substance*," and by no means intended

to receive the whole system which it contained. Upon this principle, we had good evidence that a number of Presbyteries, in the ordination and reception of ministers, and other church officers, avowedly and habitually acted. And hence, it has not been uncommon for the members of such Presbyteries publicly and formally to repudiate some of the important doctrines of the formulary which they had thus subscribed; and even, in a few extraordinary cases, to hold up the system of truth which it contains, as "an abomination;" as a system which it were to be "wished had never had an existence." No wonder that men feeling and acting thus, should have been found, in some instances, substituting entirely different Confessions of Faith in place of that which is contained in our Constitution. Who can doubt that such a method of subscribing to articles of Faith is immoral in principle; that it is adapted to defeat the great purpose of adopting Confessions, and that, if persisted in, it could not fail to open the door of our Church wider and wider to the introduction of the most radical and pestiferous heresies, which would speedily destroy her character as an evangelical body.

Was it possible for us to doubt or hesitate as to our duty, when such errors were evidently gaining ground among us, and when it was in our power judicially to condemn them? Errors which, ever since the days of the apostles, have been pronounced by the true Church to be dangerous corruptions of Gospel truth. We are conscious that in pronouncing the errors in question to be unscriptural, radical, and highly dangerous, we are actuated by no feelings of narrow party zeal, but by a firm and growing persuasion that such errors cannot fail, in their ultimate effect, to subvert the foundation of Christian hope, and destroy the souls of men. As watchmen on the walls of Zion, we should be unfaithful to the trust reposed in us, were we not to cry aloud, and proclaim a solemn warning against opinions so corrupt and delusive.

In the course of our attempts at reform, we have thought it our duty to annul the Plan of Union between Presbyterian and Congregational churches, in the new settlements, formed in 1801, and evidently intended as a temporary system, to meet a temporary exigency. By that Plan, Congregational churches were brought into complete union with the Presbyterian Church; and their delegates, without having adopted our public standards, were introduced into our judicatories, and vested with the power of giving authoritative, and, in some cases, decisive votes, on the most important questions of doctrine and discipline; and thus, in reality, of governing our Church. And it has happened, in fact, in a number of instances, that some of the most important decisions, in their bearing on the truth and order of our body, have been decided by the votes of those who had not subscribed to our ecclesiastical constitution, and stood aloof themselves from its authority. Thus Congregationalists were found, in effect, to control the Presbyterian Church, and to prohibit her carrying into execution our appropriate system, while we had no more authority over them than they chose to recognize.

It is impossible to contemplate this plan of union now, without perceiving that it is most unnatural in its character; that it has not a shadow of foundation in the constitution of the Presbyterian Church; and that it is adapted to be deeply injurious in its influence on us. It is but just, indeed, to say, that it was first proposed and commenced on our part; and that it was dictated by that spirit of unsuspecting simplicity, and fraternal confidence, which foresaw no evil. Its mischiefs gradually disclosed themselves; and it was not until they had taken wide and deep root, that they began to attract the attention, and awaken the fears of the friends of truth and of Presbyterial order. It was more and more perceived not only that this system, as before remarked, was most unequal, as it, in fact, conceded the right of governing us to those over whom we could exercise no controling power; but that its effect must be, slowly, but inevitably, to subvert the order and discipline of

the Presbyterian Church. Surely, no impartial judge can blame us for wishing this mischievous system rescinded, or for annulling it when we had the power. It is due to ourselves, however, to say, that this measure was not either hastily conceived, or abruptly executed. The union in question has been, for many years, regarded by the great body of the Presbyterian Church, as, perhaps, the most fertile source of the difficulties existing among us; especially when viewed not merely as a violation of our constitution, and an invasion of our order; but as grievously abused by those who have taken advantage of it, in a manner not intended by its original framers, to disseminate their pernicious errors. Viewing the subject in this light, the General Assembly of 1835, respectfully requested the General Association of Connecticut to consent that the Plan of Union in question should be annulled. Having now waited two additional years in vain for any favourable action in the case, on the part of our brethren of Connecticut, and having witnessed with the deepest sorrow the ever growing evils of this relation, we have felt at this time solemnly called upon to abrogate the whole plan, and to put an end as far as in us lay, to the destructive effects which have so long resulted from its operation.

If it were obviously equitable and important that the Plan of Union alluded to should be annulled, it was, in our view, no less equitable and important that the ecclesiastical bodies to which that Plan had given existence, and which were animated and governed by its spirit, should be declared to be no longer connected with our Church. It has been, indeed, painful to the Assembly, to declare bodies in which were brethren, whose piety we cannot question, and whose activity in extending the visible Church we must regard with approbation, to be no longer connected with our body. But we were shut up to this painful duty. Being irregularly brought into our Church, and retaining all the feelings and habits growing out of the circumstances of their original introduction, we could not hope that they would walk together in peace with us, so long as the points of difference between us were so many and so serious. Although the creation of more churches on the Plan of Union was made to cease by the previous act of abrogation; still, as all grant that the act which brought them in was wholly unconstitutional; and as, if this were the case, the act itself was, of course, void from the beginning, and all the acts and bodies growing out of it equally void;—we have deemed it necessary to declare the brethren connected with those judicatories, no longer connected with the Presbyterian Church. Fully aware of the painfulness of this decision to both parties, in order to avoid it, we made overtures to the brethren who were opposed to us in sentiment and in policy, which had for their object an *amicable separation*; offering them, in order to bring about such a separation, what we deemed equitable, and even indulgent terms. These terms will be learned from the correspondence of the joint committee appointed to negotiate on the subject, which has been already made public. Our brethren saw fit to decline our proposal, and chose rather to abide the enforcing of the Constitution. They cannot complain of our course, when the only alternative was the ruin of the Church, or the restoration of our form of government to its legitimate and uniform reign.

We are aware that some have called in question the constitutionality of our proceedings. On this subject, the more maturely we reflect, the more firmly are we persuaded that we have taken the most eligible, and even the only practicable course. To have attempted to separate from us the brethren with whom we could no longer walk in peace, by personal process in each case, would, obviously, have been impossible, and even if possible, tedious, agitating, and troublesome in the highest degree. The General Assembly is vested by the Constitution of our Church with plenary power "to decide in all controversies respecting doctrine and discipline; to reprove, warn, or bear testimony against error in doctrine, or immorality in practice,

in any Church, Presbytery, or Synod; to superintend the concerns of the whole Church; to suppress schismatical contentions and disputations; and in general to recommend and attempt reformation of manners, and the promotion of charity, truth, and holiness, through all the churches under their care." It is manifest that no other body but the General Assembly is competent to sit in judgment on a Synod; and it is equally manifest that no other body can be vested with power to abolish a system which the General Assembly itself had formed, without consulting any of the Presbyteries. We have, therefore, not hesitated to apply the Constitutional remedy in its fullest extent. And now reposing on the high ground of our truly primitive and apostolical system of order, we appeal with unshaken confidence to the sympathy of all evangelical churches; to the approval of the American people; and above all to the sanction of Him "who sits as King upon the holy hill of Zion."

In the adoption of these measures, we are earnestly desirous that our views and feelings in regard to our Congregational Brethren of New England, should be correctly understood. We have no controversy with them, nor do we desire to have any, with respect to the Congregational Form of Church Government as it exists among themselves, nor with any other form of church polity. Toward the excellent Brethren beloved in the Lord, in those and all other churches, who are now testifying against the errors which are troubling *them*, as they are troubling *us*, we entertain the most cordial esteem, and fraternal affection. They are engaged in the same hallowed cause with ourselves, and we cordially bid them God speed. Let there be no strife between us. There *ought* to be none, and there *will* be none, so long as there is no effort made by any party to intrude on the domestic concerns of the other. We cannot wisely attempt, with our different views and feelings, to inhabit the *same house;* but as *neighbours* we may be on the most amicable and even affectionate terms. We wish for no more than to be allowed the fair and unimpeded action of our own ecclesiastical principles. We desire to stand on our own responsibility, and not to be made involuntary sharers in the responsibility of other bodies, and systems of action, with which we cannot entirely harmonize. We desire to perform our Master's work upon the principles which we conscientiously prefer, because we believe those principles to be found in the word of God; and we cannot consent to an alliance with any individuals or bodies of men in their system of action, without reserving to ourselves the right of review, of control, and, if necessary, of correction.

It is our earnest hope, with respect to the brethren thus severed from us, that both parties will be essentially benefited by the separation. We trust that both will, henceforth, proceed in the conscientious discharge of duty, without being crippled or embarrassed by each other; and that hereafter there will be no other strife between us, than who shall love the Redeemer most, and who shall serve him with the warmest zeal.

We have already adverted to the unhappy influence which has been exerted for a number of years past, by certain voluntary societies which, though not responsible to any church and of course, therefore, not to us, were pursuing a train of measures adapted, covertly, but effectually to weaken her energies, and govern her proceedings. We believe that if there be any departments of Christian effort to which the Church of Christ is bound, in her appropriate character, to direct her attention, and her unwearied labours, they are those which relate to the training of her sons for the holy ministry, and sending the Gospel to those who have it not, and planting churches in the dark and destitute portions of the earth. To be willing to commit either of these branches of her peculiar work to foreign and irresponsible hands, we are more and more persuaded is unfaithfulness to the best interests of Zion, and adapted fatally to injure the cause of Gospel truth, and of Pres-

byterial order. Surely if the Church is under obligations, not only to maintain in her own bosom, but also to impart, as far as possible to the whole world, all such religious knowledge, worship and ordinances as God hath revealed in his word, she is bound to see to it, that no persons shall be either educated or sent forth as ministers, who are not well instructed in her doctrine and order, and, as far as can be ascertained, firmly attached to both. This is equally a dictate of duty to our Master in heaven, and to our own beloved institutions. To suffer Boards constituted by ourselves; pledged to adhere to our own standards; and responsible to our own judicatories, to languish, while we sustain and strengthen societies over which we have no control, and which are gradually undermining, at once, our purity, and of course, our real strength, while professing to add to our numbers, would be manifestly as unwise as it would be criminal in those who profess to love the Presbyterian Church, and to consider her as conformed, in her doctrine and order to the Apostolic model.

One of the most formidable evils of the present crisis is the wide spread and ever restless spirit of *Radicalism*, manifest both in the Church, and in the State. Its leading principle every where seems to be to level all order to the dust. Mighty only in the power to destroy, it has driven its deep agitations through the bosom of our beloved Church. Amidst the multiplied and revolting forms in which it has appeared, it is always animated by one principle. It is ever the same levelling, revolutionary spirit, and tends to the same ruinous results. It has, in succession, driven to extreme fanaticism the great cause of Revivals of Religion—of Temperance—and of the Rights of Man. It has aimed to transmute our pure faith into destructive heresy; our Scriptural order into confusion and misrule. It has crowded many of our churches with ignorant zealots, and unholy members; driven our pastors from their flocks; and with strange fire consumed the heritage of the Lord, filling our churches with confusion, and our judicatories with conflict; making our venerated name, and beloved institutions so far as its fearful influence extends, a hissing and a bye-word before the American people; and even threatening the dissolution of our National union, as well as the dismemberment of the Presbyterian Church.

While we have endeavoured to take, as our Master enabled us, decisive measures for securing, under the divine blessing, the future purity and peace of our body, we would openly admit, dear brethren, that mere orthodoxy, and regular scriptural government, ought not to be considered by any church as the *only*, or even as the *chief* objects of her regard. Let it never be forgotten that truth, whether in respect to doctrine or discipline, is in order to godliness; and that the real prosperity and glory of any church consists in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, enlightening, reviving, and sanctifying her members, and adding to their numbers daily of such as shall be saved. We would, therefore, now that the adorable Head of the Church has enabled us in some measure to remove from our body the most prominent sources of division and strife, humble ourselves before God, and call upon all our brethren of every name, with us to seek and pray without ceasing for those reviving and converting influences of the Holy Spirit, which alone can render any Church what it ought to be,—a real blessing to the world, and a nursery for heaven. And while we earnestly desire and implore this blessing, let us remember the great importance of distinguishing between genuine revivals of religion, and those which are spurious and fanatical. The former are the product of Gospel truth, impressed on the heart and conscience by the Holy Spirit of God. The latter are mere excitements of natural feeling, produced either by error, or by some other form of human machinery. In proportion as the former prevail, the Church is prosperous and happy. The latter, however arrogant in claim, or plausible in appearance, are only fitted to send a blight on the garden of the Lord, and to deceive and destroy the

souls of men. We fear that not a little of that which has assumed the precious name of revivals, in various parts of our bounds, is of this latter description. This lamentable fact, however, creates no prejudice in our minds against genuine revivals of religion. It rather excites us to desire and long for them with more ardour; to pray for them with more importunity; to promote them with more care by an edifying example; and to guard against all counterfeits with more enlightened vigilance.

Brethren farewell. May the God of Israel bless you all—every one. We love, with a tenderness which we cannot utter, our own portion of the Church of Jesus Christ our Lord. But we love also every other portion of the inheritance, of that dear Saviour—and rejoicing in the confident hope that heaven will ring with praises of the redeemed from amongst every Christian denomination—our ardent and constant desire is, to draw the bonds of union between us, and all the rest, as close as possible here below. Hence the present epistle to our brethren. Hence our earnest desire to explain clearly to them our posture, our action, and the solemn crisis which having first overtaken several of our sister churches, has at length fallen upon us, and will unquestionably overtake, in succession, all denominations of Christians.

And now may God of his infinite mercy set the seal of his visible approbation upon what his providence and grace have enabled us to do. And may you brethren be preserved from the evils which we have endured—or be enabled to meet them with more promptitude and fidelity than we have done.

And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, abide richly on all who love his holy name.

By order of the General Assembly.

DAVID ELLIOTT, *Moderator.*

JOHN McDOWELL, *Stated Clerk.*

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CHURCHES UNDER THE CARE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

Dear Brethren,—As the doings of the present General Assembly have been of an unusual character and such as may produce important consequences, we think it proper to lay an abstract of our decisions, and the reasons of them, before the churches under our care. Discerning men have perceived for a number of years, that the affairs of our beloved church, were hastening to a crisis; and when the members of the present Assembly, came together, the state of parties was such, as to make it manifest, that a division of the Church was the most desirable object that could be effected. What are called the Old School and New School parties are already separated in fact; in almost every part of our country, where those parties exist they have less ministerial or Christian communion with one another, than either of those parties has with Christians of other denominations; and they are so equally balanced in point of power, that for years past, it has been uncertain until the late General Assembly was fully organized, which of those parties would predominate in that body.

From these circumstances, as well as from other things, not necessary to mention, it is known to our brethren, that the floor of our highest judicatory, as well as of our Synods and Presbyteries have for years presented scenes of contention and strife, such as many of us never expected to witness in the Presbyterian Church, and such as are highly disgraceful to our Christian character. This spirit of contention deprives the church of all power for maintaining the purity of her standards, and securing that wholesome instruction, either in our pulpits or presses, which would conduce to the edification of the body of Christ; and until the parties are separated and formed into different denominations there is no ground of hope, that these contentions can be terminated.

So fully was this Assembly convinced, that a separation of the parties, was the only cure for the evils under which we labour, that a committee was appointed by common consent, composed of equal numbers from the different sides of the house, to adjust if possible the terms of an amicable division of the Church, into two separate and independent denominations. This joint committee agreed upon the principles of the division but could not agree upon the form. It was admitted on all hands, that the Old School party should retain the name and the funds of the church, and especially all the funds and property connected with the Theological Seminaries at Princeton and Pittsburgh. But on the mode of separation the Committee could not agree. The New School party would consent to no other plan than that of referring it to the Presbyteries in order to have the division made by the next General Assembly. To this plan, the other party thought there were insuperable objections. It was believed, that our Presbyteries being so widely dispersed, the returns from them would be uncertain; that many things might occur to defeat the arrangement,—and that as the probable result, the parties would come to the next Assembly, with more determination to contend for the power and government of the whole Church than on any former occasion.

On reviewing the causes from which our troubles have arisen, another plan presented itself to the view of the majority, which appeared better calculated to effect, in a peaceable manner, that division of the Church, which all seemed to consider as a matter of indispensable necessity. The contentions which distract the Church evidently arose, from the plan of union formed in 1801 between the General Assembly and the Association of Connecticut. This plan was indeed projected and brought into operation by some of the wisest and best men the Presbyterian Church has ever known, and it evidently originated from the purest and most benevolent motives. It has however been disastrous in its effects. We mean no disrespect to the Congregationalists of New England, as such; indeed there is no denomination of Christians beyond the pale of our own church whom we esteem and love more sincerely; and yet we believe that the attempt by this plan of union to bring Congregationalists and Presbyterians into the same denomination has been the principal cause of those dissentions which now distract and rend the Church to pieces.

We allude to these circumstances merely for the purpose of explaining the only remedy which appears applicable to our present troubles. The Plan of Union adopted in 1801 was evidently unconstitutional in its nature, and of a tendency to subvert the institutions and distinctive character of the Presbyterian Church. And such being the fact, it was certainly the duty of the present Assembly to abrogate said plan and to declare it void from the beginning. From this act of abrogation, and from the declaration that it was void from the beginning, it would necessarily follow, that the Churches, Presbyteries, and Synods, formed under said plan, were of course not to be considered as parts of the Presbyterian Church. From this view of the subject, it appears, that the *separation*, so necessary for the well being of the Presbyterian Church exists already, and that we have nothing to do, but to act on the facts of the case, to secure our tranquility.

1. In the first place, we have said that the act of union of 1801 was unconstitutional. It will be admitted that the most fundamental and sound parts of the constitution of any community, are those parts which form the legislative and judicial councils of the community, and designate the qualifications of the members of said councils. These are parts of the government, in all societies, deemed too sacred to be touched by any authority, excepting that which can make and unmake the constitution at its pleasure. Should any authority in the United States, assume to introduce into the State Legislatures or Congress, men not constitutionally qualified, and who were subjects of another political power, the alarm would be given at once, that a

most violent outrage had been inflicted on our governments and our rights. And although we would say it with respect, yet we *must say*, that this was the very thing which the act of 1801 effected in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church. By *that act* committee-men, belonging to the Congregational Church, and under its government, were introduced into our Presbyteries, and by the subsequent execution of the act, into our Synods and our General Assembly. Men who were under the authority of a body without our church, exercised the highest power of the Church. This was a most palpable infraction of our constitution.

In the next place all the churches formed and constituted under the operation of this *act* were at least, as much trained in doctrine and church order, on the Congregational as on the Presbyterian plan, and had just as much preparation for becoming members of a Congregational as of a Presbyterian church; and therefore any subsequent acts of any of our judicatories, forming such churches into Presbyteries or Synods, and connecting them with us as constituent parts of our body were unconstitutional. This has been the source of all our present evils; the raising up of Presbyteries and Synods out of men who had at least as much of the Congregational as Presbyterian character, has scattered the elements of discord through all our regions, and torn our afflicted Church to pieces. These indeed were consequences not perceived from the beginning; it required the light of experience to teach us, that the amalgamation of such bodies as the Congregational and Presbyterian would produce a ferment sufficient to agitate the whole American nation.

Having traced thus far the unconstitutional and pernicious tendency of this *Act*, it only remains to say; that when this act is abrogated by the proper authority, (as a matter of course,) every thing which arose under its influence and training, is abrogated with it. This we presume is the ground on which all the jurisprudence of our country stands, and upon which all our political courts and legislatures act. It has indeed been said, that when an unconstitutional law forms a contract, the abrogation of the law cannot set the contract aside, as this would suppose that a person might take the advantage of his own wrong to relieve himself from a just obligation. But to this it may be answered, that an unconstitutional law can give rise to no binding contract. The unconstitutionality supposes that the organ of government is granting what it has no right to grant, and therefore no obligation can be imposed. But in the present case the *Act in question* goes to the subversion of the Presbyterian Church, and therefore any contract which could arise under it calculated to destroy that Church, would be of such an immoral tendency as could impose no obligation;—it is one of the first principles of morals that an unlawful contract is not to be fulfilled.

It then appears plain to us, that by the abrogation of the act of 1801, the Synods of the Western Reserve, Utica, Genesee, and Geneva, are independent bodies standing on their own ground, and free to choose their future connexions, and that thus far a separation exists between us and them which may greatly conduce to the peace and comfort of both parties; and as both the majority and minority agreed in expressing the opinion, that a division of the Church in conformity with the sympathies of the present parties, was both desirable and expedient, we were much surprised to find, that the minority would not agree with us in carrying out the existing separation, so as to form the Church into two distinct bodies, either of which would be sufficiently large to form a General Assembly, and which might act peaceably in promoting the common interests of our Redeemer's kingdom. In our present connexion there is no hope of peace. The controversy threatens to become more fierce, more extensive, and more destructive of all the vital principles of religion the longer we continue together. Indeed the great motives for all the measures of separation to which we have resorted on the

present occasion are the peace, prosperity, and holiness of our beloved Church, and these objects we believe can never be obtained, until this separation is effected.

Our brethren of the minority seemed to consider it as an insult, when we urged the fact, that the abrogation of an unconstitutional law left us as distinct and separate bodies;—we intended no insult; the ground we took and the language we used implied none; we only said that they were separate from us, and we from them; if this implied disgrace on them it implied the same on ourselves; we wished both parties to consider themselves as on equal ground; and as to the unconstitutional law from which all our misapprehensions had arisen we were willing that the greater blame should lie on us. In fact our wish was and is to part as brethren, and as in certain important points of doctrine and Church order we cannot agree, let each party take the word of God as their rule of faith and practice, and pursue their course, as those who must give account to the Great Shepherd and Bishop of their souls.

We have now, dear brethren, briefly explained the reasons, for the course we have taken on the present occasion, and we believe it would have been a blessing to our Church if the measures now adopted had been resorted to at an earlier period. The progress of controversy has greatly destroyed brotherly confidence. Indeed, the union between the parties, for several years, has only existed in name; in fact, they have been two separate bodies, and we believe the sooner they are brought to consider themselves as forming distinct denominations, the sooner will they return to the spirit and principles of the Gospel of Christ.

We must observe in conclusion, that on whatever side the principal fault of our present disturbances may lie, the whole Church has abundant cause of deep humiliation and repentance before Almighty God. Our calamities have not arisen from the dust; our Heavenly Father has stretched forth his hand over us, and let us acknowledge "the rod and Him that hath appointed it." Let us return to him that he may return to us,—if he has wounded, it is he alone that can heal: if he hath broken down he can build us up.

By order of the General Assembly.

DAVID ELLIOTT, *Moderator.*

JOHN MCDOWELL, *Stated Clerk.*

Philadelphia, June 8, 1837.

REMARKS.

It may not be irrelevant to state, in addition to the information conveyed in the two circular letters of the Assembly which the Committee have thought it advisable to append to the Minutes of the Convention, that since the adjournment of the Assembly, attempts have been made by the New-school party through the press, and by means of public meetings, to awaken general indignation against the proceedings of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church. These attempts, if successful at all, have been so, only to a very limited extent. There is reason to believe that when the momentary excitement shall have subsided, the good sense and intelligence of men of all denominations will approve the course pursued by the General Assembly as the only one adapted to effect the purification and insure the permanent peace of the Church.

There is reason to believe, however, that no effort will be omitted during the present ecclesiastical year to counteract the decisions to which the friends of reform have been forced by the emergency of the Church. Already are they menaced with law-suits; soon will they be called to hear the official anathemas of the New-school Presbyteries; and means are about to be adopted to tamper with the Orthodox Presbyteries, in the hope of influencing them to disclaim all participation in the acts of their late Commissioners to the Assembly. In this latter attempt we cannot for a moment believe, that they will be at all successful. These Presbyteries when they have examined the reasons of the Assembly which justified their acts, will at once perceive, that they adopted the only alternative left them, and that had they not acted as they did, the Church would have been irretrievably injured. The Orthodox Presbyteries will also perceive, that if they do not fully support the Assembly in its late decisions, the whole controversy must be renewed with redoubled acrimony, and the Presbyterian Church will be sunk into disgrace. The Church has lost nothing by the removal of the four Synods, as they contain but a very few genuine Presbyterians who can easily gain a re-admittance. But if all the Synods should be restored, their constant effort would be to excommunicate the Orthodox. The simple question then is, shall we retain our present vantage ground, or shall we resign it to our opposers who will use it for our destruction? No Orthodox man can have any hesitation in deciding this point. We would therefore by way of hint to the Presbyteries, say,

1. Be not alarmed by the threats of law-suits, as they who are best qualified to judge in the matter, are of opinion that the proceedings of the Assembly will be fully sustained by any court of law before which they may be made to pass in review.

2. Be upon your guard against the publications which the New-school will

scatter among you, and the other artful means they may employ to induce you to reverse at the next Assembly what you have so nobly done in the last.

3. Guard carefully against the admission of new members into your Presbyteries, especially where the present Orthodox majority is not strong, as there will probably be an attempt to cast the scale, in such cases, in favour of New-schoolism during the present year.

4. At the earliest possible period let each Presbytery strongly and unequivocally express their approbation of the proceedings of the General Assembly, as this will greatly tend to strengthen the cause of orthodoxy, and to discourage any further attempt at revolutionizing our beloved Church.

5. Let extreme caution be used in selecting commissioners for the next Assembly, that they may be men of firmness and decision, whose principles and policy are not at all doubtful, but who will courageously carry out the work which has been so gloriously begun. Some judicious men have thought that it would not be amiss, if the same commissioners who so well redeemed their trust in the late Assembly, should be reappointed, as they are already well acquainted with the state of affairs.

6. Let the Presbyteries make early efforts to collect money to defray the travelling expenses of their commissioners to the next Assembly.

7. A friendly interchange of opinions by means of correspondence, between orthodox Presbyteries, would have the happiest influence in promoting that kind of union which is strength.

The most trying and difficult part of the contest is over; and all that is now wanting to complete and final success, is that the next Assembly should ratify what the last has done. Peace may soon be restored to the Church, and with peace, her usefulness will return. We are happy to state that what has been called the moderate party in the Church, fully approves of these proceedings; the orthodox are now united; and if their union and vigilance are continued another year, all will be well, and the voice of controversy will no longer be heard.

DATE DUE